

Merritt Parkway, East Branch Byram River Bridge  
Spanning the east branch of the Byram River at the  
2.84 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway  
Greenwich  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-67

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CONN,  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
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# **HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**

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## **Merritt Parkway, East Branch Byram River Bridge**

HAER No. CT-67

**Location:** Spanning the east branch of the Byram River at the 2.84 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Greenwich, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.611740.4547740  
Quad: Glenville, Connecticut

**Construction Date:** 1935

**Engineer:** Connecticut Highway Department

**Architect:** George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

**Contractor:** Peter Mitchell Construction Company  
Greenwich, Connecticut

**Present Owner:** Connecticut Department of Transportation  
Wethersfield, Connecticut

**Present Use:** Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the east branch of the Byram River

**Significance:** The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

**Historians:** Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian  
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer  
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

## LOCAL HISTORY

In July 1640, Daniel Patrick and Robert Feake, as agents of the New Haven Colony, purchased all lands between the Assmick and Potommuck brooks from local Indians. To protect their settlement Patrick and Feake signed allegiance to the Dutch at New Amsterdam, in 1642. Two years later, the Dutch raised a 130-man army and defeated the Petuquapean Indians at the site of the present village of Cos Cob in Greenwich.<sup>1</sup>

In 1650, a treaty was signed that defined the boundary line between Connecticut and New Amsterdam, removing Greenwich from Dutch control. Six years later, Greenwich again came under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony and started to prosper. In the next century, farmers settled throughout the almost fifty square miles of Greenwich. By 1756, there were nine districts in the town: Greenwich, Old Town, Horseneck, Cos Cob, North Street, Peckslan, Round Hill, Quaker Ridge, Stanwich, and Glenville. Trade with New York City prospered as ports developed at Cos Cob and the mouth of the Mianus River. The shoe-making industry developed at Banksville and Stanwich.<sup>2</sup>

With the arrival of the railroad in 1848, Greenwich commenced to change. The train reduced the time required to get to New York City. The town flourished as more and more New Yorkers traveled to Connecticut, seeking a haven from the noise and pollution of the city. By the 1920s, Greenwich was a well-established commuter suburb.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Development of Old Greenwich." Greenwich Press, 17 October 1935, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>William E. Finch, "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town," (Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Finch, 6.

As farms gave way to residential homes, traffic continued to increase on the Post Road/U.S. Route 1. Local residents soon sought an alternative to the dangerous old highway. When Commissioner Macdonald suggested building an alternative road, Greenwich's residents quickly adhered to the idea. But conflicts developed as it came time to determine a specific route.

Originally eight different plans were put forth. This eventually became a contest between two routes. Macdonald wanted a northern route going through Round Hill, North Street, and Stanwich (this become known as the Greenwich Loop). Local residents, including Highway Superintendent P. L. Minor, wanted a more southerly route through Pecksland. They felt this route would be more convenient, less expensive to build and necessary in the near future. Furthermore, local leaders preferred destroying the lower valued properties along the Pecksland route than disrupting wealthy estates to the north. Macdonald threatened to start construction at the east end of the parkway to gain support for his plan. With this obstacle out of the way, work began at the New York state line on June 1, 1934.<sup>4</sup>

#### BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

The east branch of the Byram River is a minor tributary of the Byram River. Originating in the Round Hill Country Club, it flows into main branch of the Byram River just south of the Merritt Parkway. The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to

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<sup>4</sup>"Macdonald Sees No Road Solution," Greenwich Press, 10 September 1931, p. 1.

"Highway Superintendent Minor Proposes Southern Route," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 1.

"Proposed Routes For the Merritt Highway," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 8.

"Route Goes Through Round Hill, Residents Upset," Greenwich Press, 24 March 1932, p. 1.

"400 Hear Cross and Macdonald Discuss Highway," Greenwich Press, 16 November 1933, p.

grade the Merritt from the New York state line to Round Hill Road, in Greenwich (ConnDot project #180-13). The contract for the bridge over the east branch of the Byram River also went to the Mitchell Construction Company (ConnDot project #180-13).<sup>5</sup> The bridge cost \$21,337 and was completed in 1935. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from the state line to Round Hill Road. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project #180-90). The bridge over the east branch of the Byram River has received little maintenance since it was built. Over the years some spalling concrete has been removed and replaced.<sup>6</sup>

#### BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The East Branch of the Byram River Bridge is a single-span, reinforced-concrete slab. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge at a skew of 25° and a 3.13 percent grade. The 25"-thick slab, spanning 27'-7", bears more than 2' on a ledge of the reinforced-concrete abutment walls. The abutments are integral with parallel wing walls. The joint between the slab and the abutment is carried through at the poured-in-place railing.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Finch, William E. "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town." Manuscript, Greenwich Public

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<sup>5</sup>Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

<sup>6</sup>East Branch Byram River Bridge, DOT # 694; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

Library Vertical File.

Greenwich Press. 1931-1935.

- Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.
- Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

### PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.